

A PERFECT KNOWLEDGE

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We are living in a day when the tendency to minimize the message of the Gospel has reached alarming proportions. Multitudes of Christians in America today are capable only of listing "Four Things God Wants You To Know" as the content of Christian truth, while remaining in willful ignorance of the vast areas of Biblical truth which God considers **essential** for the normal Christian. To substantiate this thought, let us turn to the New Testament.

In the first part of the seventeenth chapter of Acts, we read of Paul's visit in the town of Thessalonica for a period of two weeks, including three Sabbath days. During that time, he "reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (17:2-3). From this, we learn that Paul taught the Thessalonians concerning the atonement, the resurrection, and the Messiahship of Jesus from the Old Testament Scriptures.

But this was not all that Paul was able to accomplish in the way of instruction during those two weeks. For when we turn to his letter to the Thessalonian Christians, written shortly after his departure from them, we are astonished to find Paul saying to them: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves **know perfectly** that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (I Thess. 5:1-2). And even more astonishing are his words in II Thessalonians 2:5-6, when, after having spoken of the Day of the Lord, the final apostasy, and

the career of the Man of Sin, he says: "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, **I told you these things?**"

From the Thessalonian Epistles, then, we gain a new insight into the evangelistic and teaching ministry of the Apostle Paul, and also a new understanding of the real strength of the early Christian church and of God's desire for the church of today. The purpose of God through the Apostle Paul for that small band of "raw converts" in Thessalonica during those two weeks of meetings was not simply an acceptance of "Four Things You Must Know To Be Saved," but rather a grasp of **the whole counsel of God**, including a **perfect knowledge** of prophetic "times and seasons" and all of the events related to the Second Coming of Christ!

In order to import this tremendous body of revealed truth into the hearts and minds of the Thessalonians within such a short period of time, Paul had to overcome at least two obstacles which we do not generally face today when holding two weeks' Bible conferences. In the first place, there were **no Christians at all** in his audience when he began the meetings! There were a group of bigoted Jews who shortly stirred up the city against him (Acts 17:5-9), and a multitude of idolatrous (I Thess. 1:9) and immoral (I Thess. 4:3-7) gentiles. In the second place, the Thessalonians who finally did believe were noticeably **below average** in mental alertness (Acts 17:11), and were in desperate economic straits (II Cor. 8:2; II Thess. 3:8-10).

But these handicaps were more than overcome by Paul's God-given

passion for preaching the Gospel where Christ was not yet named (Rom. 15:20), and for imparting the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), even at the cost of engaging in a continuous night and day ministry (I Thess. 2:9; II Thess 3:8; Acts 20:31). Just before coming to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:23); and their stay in Thessalonica was threatened and finally terminated by further persecution (Acts 17:5-10). But none of these things dampened Paul's passionate determination to so thoroughly ground and establish his converts that they would **never** be shaken by persecution (II Thess. 1:4) or false doctrine (II Thess. 2:2). And as though he had not already given them enough eschatological teaching during his two weeks with them, he filled his two short epistles to them with repeated references to the Rapture (I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:4-11, 23; II Thess. 2:1, 7; 3:5), the Great Tribulation (I Thess. 5:2-3; II Thess 2:2-12), and the glorious Second Coming of Christ (I Thess. 3:13; II Thess. 1:6-10; 2:8).

Is not this one reason why Christians today are so prone to being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine? Not being grounded solidly in **the faith**, how can they be expected to discern error? And not having their hearts and minds filled with **the truth**, how can they be expected to give first "their own selves to the Lord" (II Cor. 8:5), and then of their means (II Cor. 8:2-4), that the Word of the Lord might be "sounded out . . . in every place" (I Thess. 1:8), as Paul could say of his Thessalonian converts, only two weeks old in Christ?